



27 April 2005



SAFETY ALERT **Youth Electrocuted While** **Climbing on Railcar**

1. A German youth was electrocuted recently when he climbed onto an armored vehicle that was loaded on a railcar. He died when he was hit by a 15,000-volt arc of electricity from the powerlines above the railcar. He was only 18 years old. His 16-year-old companion was severely burned when he tried to rescue him.

2. By now, all Soldiers should be well aware of USAREUR policy on staying off of railcars once they are loaded. This policy, which is in AE Regulation 55-4, paragraph 36d(3)(a); and AE Pamphlet 385-15, paragraphs 29 and 30, was implemented because of several on- and off-duty fatalities and serious injuries that resulted when Soldiers climbed on railcars and came too close to the overhead powerlines.

3. This latest tragedy serves as a reminder of what can happen if this policy is ignored. It also shows why we must teach our family members about the dangers of climbing on railcars, and highlights the related hazards of trying to rescue someone from this type of accident.

- Children must be warned to stay away from railyards. The theme of the German Rail Youth Protection Program is *A Railyard is Not a High-Adventure Playground*. Ensure your family members understand the risks involving railroads and the reasons why railroad tracks and railcars are off limits.

- Overhead rail powerlines in Germany have an incredibly high voltage and are extremely dangerous. The electricity these lines carry can arc several feet before hitting and electrocuting you, just like a bolt of lightning. You do not have to touch these powerlines to be killed! Only a handful of specially trained individuals have the knowledge and skill to safely ground the system and attempt a rescue. Other rail systems in Europe are similar. Because of this danger, people who witness someone being shocked by these powerlines must not try to rescue or administer first aid unless the victim is thrown or falls well away from the power source. The safest thing to do is stay at a safe distance and call for help. In Europe, the number to call is usually 110 or 112.

4. The results of coming too close to overhead rail powerlines are quick and severe. Many of you may have seen *The Green Mile*, a 1999 film starring Tom Hanks. The film included a very graphic scene in which a man was executed in an electric chair. That scene illustrates what it is like to be hit by an arc of electricity from a rail powerline.

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5. Again, keep in mind that you can be seriously injured or killed without even touching a rail powerline. If you get too close to the line, the electricity will arc to the closest part of your body. Bystanders will hear a pop and see a flash. The arc will cause burn holes where it enters and exits the body, and the victim's clothing may catch fire. The current literally cooks the flesh and disrupts electrical impulses in the brain, the heart, and other muscles.

6. When I issued Bell Sends #3, SAFETY ALERT - Rail Operations, on 19 April 2003, I told you about a Soldier who climbed on top of a railcar and was severely burned. He survived, but is permanently disabled. The picture below shows the vehicle on which the Soldier was climbing when he was injured. The circles indicate pieces of the Soldier's clothing and burn marks where the electricity passed through the Soldier and into the vehicle. This is the grim reality of being injured by high-voltage electricity.



7. This type of tragedy can be prevented by ensuring everyone—Soldiers, civilian employees, and family members—understands the dangers of railyards and, specifically, of climbing on railcars. Our goal is *No Loss of Life*. To help us achieve that goal, make sure everyone in your organization and in your family reads this message. Understanding and complying with this safety alert will help ensure we all remain safe and able to continue executing with excellence Any Mission, Anywhere.

B. B. BELL
General, US Army
Commanding

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